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THESIS

EXCELLENCE IN THE VP NAVY

by

Steven J. Sigler

December 1984

Thesis Advisor: R.T. Harris

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considered excellent by these senior officers are examined to determine how they go about achieving excellence.

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Excellence in the VP Navy

by

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Lieutenant Commander, United States Navy
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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"Excellence in the VP Navy" is examined, first by providing the views of various senior naval officers at the functional and operational wing level; then, four squadrons considered excellent by these senior officers are examined to determine how they go about achieving excellence.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Did you ever wish that you could go over and chat with the Commodore for a while so that you could ask him what he is looking for when he evaluates your squadron?[1] Wouldn't it be nice to know the types of things he looks at so that you could concentrate on the important items? We all know that in the world of fixed-wing patrol aviation called VP[2] there just aren't enough hours in the day to do all that is required. All we really need is the gouge so that we can set our priorities and concentrate on those areas that will have the most impact. Right? Right!

Well, I don't have the gouge, but I may have the next best thing. While going to the Naval Postgraduate School, I was given the opportunity and the funding (aviator's delight) to find out just what it is that makes one or two squadrons in each wing stand out as "excellent." Initially, I wanted to find out exactly what the Commodore and his staff were looking for and using in their grading criteria. Then, I wanted to go to the squadrons that they defined as excellent

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[1] A P-3 squadron consists of 320 officers and enlisted who fly and maintain the squadron's nine anti-submarine aircraft.

[2] For those who are not familiar with the VP structure, please see the appendix for an explanation.

to find out what they were doing different or better than the average squadron. Hopefully, I would find some traits or attributes common among the excellent squadrons. These would certainly be of interest to all VP'ers striving to do a better job. This is exactly what I set out to do.

My plan of attack was twofold. First, I wanted to talk to the senior officers. I began at the top and talked to the functional wing commanders and post-command members of their staff who were commanders and above. I additionally talked to the operational wing commanders and their staff as well, using the same criteria. I asked them to tell me the indicators that they use to judge the squadrons. I wanted to know how they, in their role as significant evaluators, determine their best or excellent squadrons. After they had given me their definition of an excellent squadron, I asked them for specifics, i.e., which squadrons were (1) excellent and (2) not deployed. My second phase was to talk to a cross-section of the personnel in these squadrons to determine what it was like to be in that squadron. I wanted to know what they were doing that made them "sierra hotel."

I'll be the first to admit that my search for excellence and the results are not quantitative. I am not a number cruncher and don't profess to be. If that is what you're expecting, this is not the study for you. However, if you're still with me, mine is a subjective approach by design

because in the final analysis, that is how it is really done. Oh sure, we use a lot of numbers in determining who is the best. The readiness figures have to be right up there and all the hoops have to be cleared. But when it comes right down to the wire, usually the best is decided upon by intuition. My interest is in how they arrive at their intuitive conclusions of which squadrons are excellent.

II. GUIDANCE FROM ABOVE

The initial phase of my study was to talk to as many as possible of the upper level management--commodores, captains and commanders--of the VP community. I wanted to determine how they decide which squadrons are the best. What indictors do they use to determine excellence in their own minds? I specifically asked them what indicators they use in their day-to-day dealings with the squadrons to make their appraisals of which ones are best. This included not only the things they saw from their vantage point at the wing or type command, but also indicators they noticed when they visited the squadrons. During this phase, I talked with fifteen post-command officers from both the Atlantic and Pacific functional wings and four operational wings.

To get the ideas and thoughts of our leaders, I wanted to start at the top of the VP structure and work down to the wing level. So, I started at the functional wing commander level. I went to both Commander, Patrol Wings Atlantic and Commander, Patrol Wings Pacific. In both instances, I was well received and both promised their full support on a not-to-interfere basis. I must tell you that I was more than a bit apprehensive when I initially forged out to interview our top leaders and members of their staff. But they soon put me

at ease and were very interested and enthusiastic about excellence in the VP Navy. To a man, they seemed eager to share their views and experiences in a forthright and helpful manner. From the type commander level, I branched out to the wing commanders and their staff. Here again, I was treated to the wisdom and intellect of a group of very dynamic leaders, totally involved in the leadership and management of our VP Navy. What a treat! I got a chance to listen to our successful leaders expound on their theories of what works.

Our leaders gave me more than expected, in typical naval aviator fashion. They not only gave me the indicators they use to judge a squadron, both external and internal, but they also gave me their thoughts and ideas on how this level of excellence could be reached. So I have included their ideas of excellence and how to obtain it in the section appropriately called "The Gouge." Due to their contributions, this is an excellent section and cuts right to the meat of the matter. Even if your reading time is severely limited, I highly recommend glancing through this section as it represents a wealth of knowledge from experienced, successful leaders.

Just a note about method. Throughout my conversations with out leaders, and subsequent interviews in the squadrons, I promised and will maintain anonymity. This was to promote the free flow and exchange of ideas. I heard many approaches to leadership and management. I have tried to include the

ones that I heard repeatedly even though expressed somewhat differently. These were the ones that I felt would be of most value to the VP community as being common to the greatest number of people. Additionally, while talking to our leaders, some of their thoughts and ideas were so inspiring that they would cause a chill up the ole' spine. I have tried to include some of these for preservation within the community. I have often quoted them verbatim, for their ideas and thoughts provide guidance and insight into our world of VP. Many of these were just back to the basics, but it sure was good to hear.

The next chapter is a presentation of those attributes that I found our leaders use most often in their determination of "excellence." Some of these were obvious and emphasize what we know to be true from life in the squadron. However, others provide useful insight into areas that may still be a bit hazy.

III. AS SEEN FROM THE WING

A. BRING HOME THE BACON

Without a doubt, the main indicator in determining excellence among the squadrons is their operational performance. The senior officers all agree that this is the bottom line. As stated by one captain, "What do I look for specifically in indicators? ASW (Anti-submarine Warfare) performance--essentially how consistently good they are on station."[1] He went on to say that the readiness system is important to him in this determination of who is the best, but that it does not tell the whole story. According to him, a squadron that performs well on station will also have high readiness marks, but that a squadron can have high marks in all the readiness categories and still not be able to perform on station where it counts. Therefore, his number one indicator is how well the squadrons perform on station. These senior officers use the squadrons' operational abilities and performance over the long haul to determine their best. It sounds a little different from one senior officer to another, but the basic message rings through loud and clear. They are looking for the squadrons that can bring

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[1] On station refers to the operational environment, i.e., open ocean operations.

home the bacon. One chief staff officer stated it bluntly, "Can they get the bombs on the target when they have to?" This idea of bringing home the bacon is not restricted to purely operational flights. These senior officers expect their best to achieve superior results regardless of the mission. Even in those cases where there is little or no glory in the task, they still expect these guys to do a bang-up job. Their confidence in the operational excellence of a squadron comes only after an extended period of observation as seen in the next section. However, there is total consensus on this first and foremost indicator of excellence.

1. Sustained Superior Performance

As previously stated, these senior officers emphatically agree that the performance must be continuous. They are looking for sustained, superior performance from the squadrons. One captain, whose statement was representative, put it quite well, "I don't think you can base your judgment of a good squadron one instance or one evolution that they worked themselves up for. It's got to be sustained performance over the long term." They realize that any squadron can put their total concentration into one major evolution and probably maximize their score. However, they doubt seriously that this approach will work in the long run. Even though a squadron may bask in a short-lived glory, this approach will ultimately catch up with them and they will be

found wanting. The truly excellent squadron is the one that maintains a constant, steady increase towards superior performance and will be able to maintain that state of readiness for the duration. By the same token, these excellent squadrons never rest in their pursuit of getting better. They do not rest on their laurels for a moment. It must be a continuous striving to not only maintain their high state of readiness, but to increase it as well. It is this type of continuous operational success and striving to improve that the leaders use to earmark the excellent squadrons.

2. Readiness and Reports

The readiness reports, as well as the many other reports from the squadron, are monitored continuously by the senior officers. Some wings track these reports more closely than others, but all readily admit that they play an important part in their formulation of which squadrons are the best. One wing commander walked me through the weekly training reports he receives from each squadron. By watching these from week to week and month to month, he feels that he gains a good grasp for how each squadron is doing. He bases his opinions on multiple indicators and trends vice any one indicator and is able to quickly see who the stellar performers are. Of one squadron that scored consistently high in virtually every category, the commander explained that they were in a very difficult time of preparation just

prior to deployment, yet continued to perform admirably. This is a definite indication of excellence.

Other reports were mentioned as being monitored as an indictor even though they appear to have no direct relation to readiness. Several of the chief staff officers stated that they could tell a good deal about how the squadrons are run by watching the Personnel Manning Assistance Report (PERSMAR). This is a manning report required from the squadrons six to eight months prior to deployment. Updates are required at five months and two months prior to deployment. According to these senior officers, a well-run squadron is also watching their manning and will have a smooth transition into the deployment phase of operation with no manpower crunch. It's a sign of good management and pre-planning.

I can't leave this section without mentioning on time take-offs. If you haven't felt the pressure to make your take-off time, you have just arrived on board (in which case, welcome aboard), or you've been hiding under a rock. As a possible explanation to the emphasis placed on this indicator, ten of the fifteen senior officers interviewed specifically mentioned that they closely watch for on-time take-offs. As one captain put it, "How often do they get off on time with up airplanes? To me that's an indication of a squadron that is moving well. It means that maintenance and

crew are doing their job." They're using this indicator to judge not only the management of the aircrews, but the performance of the entire maintenance department as well.

3. Small Things Count Also

Every one of the senior officers mentioned achievements in areas other than the primary mission. As one commodore stated, "I don't care if you ask them to run a dog show for the Navy Exchange. They would do that well." He was, in no way, trying to demean the importance of these other activities. He was merely pointing out that these squadrons put their all into even the most apparently insignificant task, even one that has nothing to do with their primary purpose. As all squadrons do, these squadrons participate in good causes such as the Navy Relief Drive. It's just that they seem to be more committed to being successful at everything they do. At two different wings, the chief staff officers told me they fully expected their excellent squadron to come out on top of their Navy Relief Drive. According to one, "They can talk to their people and say, 'Alright, in addition to being professional in the airplane, we've got to take care of our own (support the Navy Relief), and this is something that we want to do.' They take care of the little things." According to them, for the squadrons that take care of the little things, the big things will take care of themselves. So even though they are of a

lower priority than the primary mission, the senior officers still use the little things as indicators of excellence.

B. OPERATIONAL AGGRESSIVENESS

Without exception, the attribute of operational aggressiveness on the part of the squadrons was mentioned by the senior offices as playing a large role in their determination of excellent squadrons. They feel that these squadrons are more eager, more aggressive and willing to jump on opportunities that others try to get out of. One commander seemed to sum up what was being said when he stated, "Is the squadron aggressive? Do they start ahead of the tasking agency? Do they stay far enough ahead so that they're able to anticipate what's going to happen to them 2-3 days down the road and line up aircraft and crews and second guess the Soviets even better than the tasking agency is doing?" They feel that the squadron must have an aggressive operations department that is eager to jump on new tasking and has a schedule of events all ready to go whenever the situation arises. That degree of aggressiveness on the squadron's part has got to be there.

In speaking of this aggressiveness, another commander stated, "Hard, difficult short-fused tasking. There are two squadrons that I am convinced--if the bubble went up, they'd be the first ones out of the box. And that's because, when we have something that's real world now, those are the two

that we call on--because we know they'll do it right and they'll do it on time...That's the difference." It is this type of confidence that the senior officers need to have in the aggressiveness of the squadrons before they consider them excellent.

This type of aggressiveness must pervade the excellent squadrons. Two of the wings feel the squadrons should aggressively pursue their own training plans with little or no direction from the wing. In their opinion, the best ones are the ones that take off on their own, writing their own aggressive training plan, and accomplishing such feats as fully qualifying first-tour pilots in as little as fifteen months (eighteen is average, twenty-four is the maximum allowed). During the at-home cycle, the wing and staff try to keep the tasking of the squadrons to a minimum so they are able to train and take advantage of the at-home cycle. However, when unavoidable tasking does present itself, the excellent squadrons jump in and volunteer for flights. They fight over who's going to get the flights even if they occur on a weekend. These guys get all their required readiness without any explicit direction from the wing. This is the type of aggressiveness that these wings are looking for in an excellent squadron. When push comes to shove, the wing is looking for some good ole' aviation can-do spirit! Excuses just don't hack it!

C. TAKE CARE OF THEIR OWN

Without fail, the senior officers all mentioned that the excellent squadrons take care of their people throughout the command. This can not be limited to any one rank or rate, but must pertain to all, from the department head down to the wrench turner. A chief staff officer gave an example at the department head level that showed the type of care they witness from the excellent squadrons. When the squadrons send two or three aircraft away on a detached operation for any extended period of time, they designate the senior officer as OINC (Officer in Charge). This is a nice ticket for a lieutenant commander to have when coming up for selection to commander and squadron command. These squadrons automatically initiate a concurrent fitness report which accredits this officer his due. In other cases the wing has to actively solicit this response. This same type of caring applies to the person on the hangar deck. The excellent squadrons care about the individual and take care of his needs. The people in these organizations take the time to listen to their personnel and provide assistance whenever possible. They may not have all the answers, but they know where to get help for their people. This approach seems simple enough and is working for the excellent squadrons.

Some of the senior officers use it differently than others, but most did refer to retention when speaking of

taking care of their own. As one captain said, "Those people that are happy are staying in the service--perhaps extending in the squadron--because they like what they're doing. They think what they're doing is good for the Navy, good for the country, and it's good for themselves. They're self-satisfied and they want to stay. So I don't think good retention is the reason that a squadron is good. But I think when you see good retention, you've identified a good squadron." This exemplifies the way the senior officers use retention as an indicator. They are really making note of the squadrons that take care of their people.

To summarize the external attributes that the majority of the senior officers use as an indication of excellence, they are:

* the squadrons tnat bring home the bacon
  - consistently
  - while maintaining readiness and the reporting system
  - and they take care of their people.

Now, we'll examine those indicators that the senior officers observe when they visit the squadrons and get their firsthand observations of the excellent squadrons.

IV. ON THE HANGAR DECK

After getting the senior officers' ideas on their indicators of excellence as seen from afar, I asked them what are the indicators they notice when they go aboard to visit the squadrons. What are the things they notice on the hangar deck of the excellent squadrons? The majority of the senior officers stated that it was just a feeling they get when they go aboard those excellent squadrons. When I pinned them down to specific indicators, these are the answers I received. As one commander summarized it rather nicely, "It's all those things we were so concerned with as newly commissioned ensigns. It's cleanliness of spaces, fresh haircuts, the pride in the unit, and teamwork--that sort of thing." So now, I'll try to give you a flavor of those things mentioned most often by the senior officers.

A. ATTITUDE

The first thing mentioned by the senior officers during their visits to the squadrons is the attitude of the people. Several feel that even during a formal visit such as an inspection, they can have a good feel for whether or not this is an excellent squadron within five to ten minutes. This is based on the attitude of the people they encounter in just those few short minutes. This attitude is one that must come

from the top and be imparted to all the personnel of the command. They feel they can determine if the squadron has the right attitude by speaking with the people in one-on-one conversations and just by observing the way they keep their spaces and maintain their aircraft. A representative comment by a chief staff officer was, "You just walk across the hangar deck or walk around the spaces and just by the way the spaces look, by the way the people walk, by the way they smile or don't smile, or speak or don't speak (that tells me if they have the attitude of an excellent squadron)." Not all are sure you can establish it quite that fast, because it is possible to catch even an excellent squadron when they are down a bit. But, all agree that this attitude will eventually shine through to establish the squadron as excellent.

This attitude also comes across as a winning spirit. This was mentioned by the senior officers as a pervading feeling that encompasses the squadron that they are winners from the start, regardless of the competition. It is not a haphazard approach to winning, but a professional and well organized approach. According to the seniors, this can readily be seen as professionalism throughout their organization. If they walk into any of the work spaces, they know they will find clean areas, shining decks and fresh paint in a formal inspection. Even on informal visits (if

there is such a thing), they know they will find such things as a maintenance control that is run professionally, not a hub of confusion. The place is run professionally because that is their approach to winning. According to one of the seniors, it's the squadron that is standing the ready,[1] is the hosting squadron,[2] doesn't drop a commitment and is still able to meet that transiting crew at 3:00 in the morning with the traditional beer and soda and a welcome aboard smile. That kind of winning spirit is infectious in the excellent squadrons.

B. LOOKS, ACTS, AND FEELS GOOD

The senior officers gave total encompassing ideas of the types of things they look for as they go aboard. Just as you and I thought, they conceded that there is no such thing as an informal visit to a squadron by a wing commander or chief staff officer. It seems that no matter how hard they try, they continually take note of things around the squadron and they are always looking around. Due to the insight it provides, I've included one chief staff officer's comments on a formal squadron visit. It summarizes the comments of most of the seniors while providing vivid examples.

---

[1] Refers to the ready alert period, when a squadron is required to have a crew ready to launch around the clock.

[2] The host squadron assists transient aircraft and crews.

> I come into the parking lot when I drive up--you drive in past the duty office, usually. Do all of them know who he (the commodore) is and who I am? Do they call attention on deck when you walk in or not? The passageway down to the CO's office--is it clean? Butt kits, ashtrays--the normal cleanliness you would expect to see anywhere. When you walk into Admin (administrative office), do they call attention on deck? They don't have to, but...Do junior people stand up when they're talking to a senior? Typical military courtesies that you see. What does the airplane look like when you're flying? Is it clean--is it dirty? What do the aircrews look like? Are they willing to teach you something? Just because I've got 6,000 hours of P-3s, doesn't mean that I can't learn something and I don't consider myself the best pilot in the world--just don't do it that much anymore. A lot of people are reluctant to criticize you just because of your seniority. I've never agreed with that and I still don't. I'm just as dangerous--if not more dangerous--than a lieutenant that way. So those are the kinds of things I look for.

This is a fairly representative presentation of the things that the senior officers notice on formal visits with the added insight of this particular chief staff officer's thoughts on flying with the squadrons.

Another aspect that the majority of the senior officers noted was that the excellent squadrons are not at all uncomfortable because someone is inspecting their squadron. Because of their attitude that they are a winner, they are generally confident, not cocky, and they maintain a relaxed atmosphere. They know their job, they know what they are all about and they don't mind showing it. The personnel of the excellent squadrons are more than willing, even eager, to explain things to the commodore or anyone else. They have no reservation about talking to the senior officers. As one

senior officer explained it, they don't have that sterile feeling.

One additional aspect was added by the senior officers. They are totally aware that there is no such thing as an informal visit to the squadrons. They fully expect to see clean spaces, shipshape equipment, and sharp-looking sailors when they visit. But this is not their only indicator because they realize that a task master can spiffy up a squadron for a particular visit. In order to determine the appearance and especially attitude of a squadron, they talk to others who visit the squadron on an informal and somewhat regular basis. They are particularly interested in how people are treated during those visits. The excellent squadrons are eager to greet the visitor, proud of their squadron and quickly determine how they may be of assistance. Once again, the seniors are looking for indications over an extended period of time vice the one shot visit impressions. In so doing, any task masters are quickly eliminated from consideration as an excellent squadron.

To sum up the indicators that the senior officers monitor during actual visits to the squadron, they are obviously looking for clean spaces, sharp sailors and well-kept equipment. But they are also looking for a super attitude combined with a winning spirit. These indicators must run deep and must be embodied throughout the personnel of the

squadron in order for the senior officers to consider them excellent.

How does a squadron go about achieving all these characteristics? Funny you should ask, because the senior officers all offered their thoughts on how to reach such a state of excellence and we will now explore their ideas.

V. THEIR GOUGE

As I said before, when I asked the senior officers for their indicators of excellence, they gave me more than I expected. They also gave me their ideas on how to achieve this degree of excellence. In this section that I have called "Their Gouge," I will give you some of their ideas as to how this excellence can be achieved.

A. THE COMMANDING OFFICER AT THE CORE

All the senior officers said in some way or another that it all starts with the man at the top, the commanding officer (CO). He is all important. He is the one that must determine where the squadron is going and provide the impetus for success. The majority of the senior officers feel that the excellent squadrons mirror the personality of the commanding officer and his presence can be felt throughout the spaces. His desires, wishes, and leadership pervade the entire squadron to the extent that even in his absence, it's still business as usual, total professionalism. The CO that will reach the pinnacle of excellence will do so through team effort. He provides the squadron with a purpose and a vision of accomplishment. Then, intermediate goals are agreed upon and disseminated throughout the squadron so that every individual can adapt tnose as his own. The CO must then

begin an education process to have his department heads run the squadron as he would or suggest a better alternative. This frees the CO to watch the big picture and peak and tweak the team and its direction to adapt to the changing environment while the XO ensures internal organization is running smoothly and in consonance with the CO's wishes.

All the senior officers emphasized the total team concept. The CO needs to be continuously aware of his entire team and checking on its progress. They feel that the CO should be constantly making spot checks with such valuable members as the XO, the command master chief and the flight surgeon. He should use them to provide him feedback on how the squadron is doing. The XO works continuously and directly with the middle management while the master chief has the pulse of tne command and should keep the CO continuously informed. The flight surgeon serves as the pressure relief valve in that squadron personnel go to him when their really personal needs are not being met within the system. He can often advise the CO when it's time to pull back a little on the power levers and give the squadron some time off. By using fully those around him, the commanding officer will best be able to stay current on the status of his team and continue their quest for excellence.

B. CONFIDENT OF SUCCESS

In one form or another, all of the senior officers said that the squadron has to have the idea that they are going to be successful. They have to believe in themselves and know that they are going to do well, regardless of the task. This is particularly important during the initial phase of a deployment or at the start of a new prosecution.[1] The first prosecution of a deployment can make or break the squadron for the whole rest of the deployment and even on into the home cycle. The senior officers feel that the crews have to launch knowing that they're going to go out and gain contact, possibly fourth CZ (convergence zone), and localize the target to direct path followed by several successful, simulated attacks. This is the attitude of the successful crews which make up the successful squadrons that attain excellence.

The senior officers feel that it is paramount that the squadrons continue to achieve success. It takes a lot of hard work and dedication to get the ball rolling, but once you get it moving, success breeds success. Once the people get the taste of success and realize how they got there, they are more than willing to continue. The successful squadrons do whatever is necessary to keep that momentum going. They

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[1] A prosecution is a series of flights to initially detect, track, and monitor the location of a submarine.

do not task their personnel and crews with unachievable goals. In those rare cases that the excellent squadrons miss the mark, they immediately establish new, readily achievable goals in order to keep the ball rolling.

Occasionally, this success was given a helping hand. One commander explained that when he was the CO of a squadron, he took an active role in setting the stage for success during their initial deployment phase. It seems that he had knowledge of a submarine's location near the route of flight of one of the transiting crews on the way to the deployment site. At the proper time, he had the crew bring up the detection equipment and sure enough, they gained contact on a submarine while still enroute to the deployment site. When they landed from their transit flight, they were already a success and the squadron really made a big thing out of it. According to the commander, this set the stage for the entire deployment which was a record breaker. Success truly breeds success!

C. MACRO-MANAGEMENT AT ALL LEVELS

The idea of macro-management[1] was mentioned by a strong majority of the senior officers. They feel that this is the only approach to take to reach excellence. Additionally,

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[1] The macro-manager is the opposite of a micro-manager. He explains the goal or task to be completed without getting into the details of exactly how it must be completed.

this approach develops subordinates when used throughout the chain of command. One captain's statement was representative when he said, "I've always felt that the best skippers I ever worked for were the ones who gave me my head." The delegation of responsibility and the leeway within which to accomplish the necessary tasks are necessary requisites to developing the full potential of the squadron. This approach gains large returns from those who are allowed to operate in this manner. It seems the more they are trusted and relied upon, the harder they strive not to let their superiors down. The subordinates must keep the superiors informed as to progress or any unforeseen developments, but the subordinates are given a great deal of freedom in how the task should be completed. I definitely remember those times best that I was allowed a lot of leeway and given my head. Apparently the senior officers feel it works best at every level of the squadron as well.

D. HONESTY AND INTEGRITY ALLOW LEARNING FROM MISTAKES

If there was one attribute that came up as pervading all aspects of the command, it was honesty and integrity in all things. These senior officers feel these attributes are necessary to give us our own perceptions of self-worth, that what we are doing is right, and that we are doing it the right way. It is most important for the squadron to be open and honest, willing to admit mistakes. They feel that if

this inclination is not there, the information ceases to flow up and down the chain and pretty soon the command doesn't know where the errors are. The excellent squadrons make mistakes as do all squadrons. However, they readily admit their mistakes, discuss them openly and consequently learn from their errors. They also keep themselves informed to be able to learn from the mistakes of other squadrons. Finally, and possibly of supreme importance, by maintaining honesty and integrity in all things, this approach provides guidance to everyone in the squadron in the absence of explicit guidance from superiors. This is a very powerful attribute and one found in all of the excellent squadrons by the senior officers.

E. HE'S EVERYWHERE (MBWA)

In ten of the fifteen interviews with senior officers, they stated that the CO must be highly visible throughout his command. This is the same idea that Peters and Waterman refer to as "Management by Walking Around." According to these senior officers, a CO has to be out and about the hangar deck regularly and around to all the spaces. He has to let his department heads know, up front, that this is his policy so that it is not misunderstood. However, the CO has got to get down on that hangar deck and listen to what his troops have to say. Even if they just want to talk about the last baseball game, they need to know he is there and that he

cares about them. One chief staff officer's comment was representative, "The CO that doesn't go down at 3 o'clock in the morning and talk to the night check people--or climb up on on a check stand and talk to some airman that's changing the fuel control for him--he's kidding himself." They feel that the only way for the CO to truly know what's going on in his squadron is to do some regular management by walking around. They feel that it cannot be done by sitting up in the ivory tower and waiting for the information to come to them. Several of the chief staff officers at the wing level stated that they could tell if a CO was getting out and about his squadron. Mainly, it was the ones who weren't that became immediately noticeable. These were the ones that when a problem arose from their squdron and made it to the wing level, they had no idea that the problem even existed, even though it came out of their own organization. Consequently, these senior officers feel that the CO has to be everywhere within that squadron. It is mandatory!

F. COMMUNICATIONS: EVERYONE IS INVOLVED

Communications and getting out the word came up in every interview. These senior officers feel that it is imperative that communications must be effectively distributed throughout the chain of command and it must be a two-way street. According to them, it starts before day one with the CO and everyone in the chain letting the person know what

the goals of the squadron are and precisely how they fit into the overall plan. It is not a one time shot, but must be an ongoing process using all the old standards such as the plan of the day, quarters, general announcements, the flight schedule, and one-on-one interviews. But even that is not enough. There must be checks to ensure that the word is actually getting out. These come in many different forms, but the important part is that the excellent squadrons use such things as captains calls or suggestion boxes, whatever it takes to make sure the word is getting up and down the chain. They feel that the organization must be receptive to legitimate complaints of its personnel and willing to change when necessary. This type of responsiveness is necessary for the individual to feel that he is a part of the team and can affect its destiny.

I can't leave this portion without giving the insight of a captain that said, "Everybody's got to have a feeling that their voice can be heard. Everybody should know that once their voice is heard--that doesn't mean that what they say is going to happen--so you have to have feedback to that voice--that says, 'Hey, I hear what you're saying but it's not feasible or practical and I don't want to do that--I want to do this instead.' (But you must give) some response to their voice." This makes a lot of sense and summarizes the type of

communications that must be achieved to become excellent. The lines of communication must remain open.

G. PLANNING IS THE PREFERRED MODE OF OPERATION

All the senior officers mentioned planning in some form or another in their achievement of excellence. One commander explained that what you end up with if you don't form a plan is guaranteed, complete chaos. Planning allows for successful completion of tasks through organization. The senior officers realize that there are continuous and constant changes to the best made plans. However, even if everyone in the squadron knows where they are going, without a plan they'll have a tough time getting there. By planning, the excellent squadrons not only define a plan of how to get where they're going, they also set priorities on the different events along the way. In reality, many of the major tasks that a squadron face, particularly during the at-home cycle, don't change from year to year. A well planned approach to these "hoops," as they are called, can assure the rapid and successful completion of each one. This orderly approach and successful accomplishment of tne various requirements during work-up or while deployed can result only if the proper planning is done. Without it, we all end up in a mode of crisis management and as the commander said, "There isn't enough time for crisis management--just isn't. Plus,

it's more fun to do it right!" These excellent squadrons do it right, the first time, everytime!

H. TRAINING STAYS ON THE FRONT BURNER

There was some disagreement among the senior officers as to where the emphasis should be placed, in training or operations. But there was definite consensus that both are necessary and the majority feel that training is the approach to successful operations. By this they mean that through a good training plan, excellent and safe operations can be achieved. According to the senior officers, the squadron that completes a comprehensive training program will be the squadron that operates safely. This requires an aggressive pursuit of the NATOPS, tactics, and maintenance training. They feel that the squadrons must have a very good training plan and be very, very serious about implementing it. Training can not be subverted in the name of operations, except in rare instances when absolutely necessary. Training must remain on the front burner as a top priority and all else will follow.

I. BE AGGRESSIVE, BUT SAFE

I've always wondered exactly what is the priority given to safety? How do the senior officers feel about it? Well I found some interesting comments on safety in almost all my interviews, but it was more of an aggressive safety approach.

They definitely didn't want to keep the birds in the barn just to be safe. They feel that the squadron that trains properly and operates correctly because of their training will also be the safe squadron. They are the ones that are always in the books and studying the latest changes so that nothing catches them by surprise. They have an active safety department that has true concern for the individual on the hangar deck or on any of the flight crews. They run drills and stage mock accidents to prevent their people from becoming complacent. By doing so, they maintain a continual safety awareness throughout the squadron. They realize that nothing we do in peacetime warrants risking the lives of any of the personnel. They have their priorities straight and safety must be an integral part of all operations and training. That's the bottom line!

J. LAUNCH 'EM

So there you have it! The senior officers' gouge on how to attain excellence. Their ideas on how to go about accomplishing this state emphasized the following aspects:

* The commanding officer at the core
* Confident of success
* Macro-management at all levels
* Honesty and integrity allow learning from mistakes
* He's everywhere (MBWA)
* Communication: everyone is involved

* Planning is the preferred mode of operation
* Training stays on the front burner
* Be aggressive, but safe.

Believe me, there were other ideas and many of them sounded terrific, but again I tried to hit the ones that most of the senior officers mentioned. Also, in this section, I could have included a section on taking care of our own, but since this was covered in an earlier section, I did not repeat it. However, I must emphasize that the senior officers know full well that the people are our most important asset!

This section alone made the effort worth it to me. It was sure nice to hear the ideas and thoughts of our leaders on how to go about achieving excellence. However, tnis was not the end. I next asked the senior officers to identify specific squadrons that had achieved this status. Which squadrons were, in their mind, excellent? The next several chapters are the story of several of those excellent squadrons. Read on!

VI. AT THE HANGAR

Just imagine, a dynamic CO leading a squadron on a roll, with everyone doing his or her part, while planning and training their way to safe accomplishments with total integrity. Sound a little far fetched? Not so, say the senior officers. And in fact they gave me examples of squadrons that were there or very close to that already. These were the squadrons that they felt were doing it the right way. These were the squadrons that they felt I should talk to or try to determine their secrets of success. Were they, in fact, doing the things that the senior officers felt were necessary in order to achieve excellence?

I wanted to talk to the guys who were doing it right. At the end of each of the previous interviews with senior officers at the type commander and wing level, I would always ask them to identify their excellent squadrons for me. At most locations, there was a readily identifiable consensus as to which of the squadrons were excellent. At one location, there was no such consensus, so I decided not to interview the squadrons there. Other problems occurred also. In several cases, there was immediate consensus that a certain squadron was excellent, but they were deployed which prevented me from getting to talk to them.

In total, I was able to visit two functional wings, four operational wings and four nominated "excellent" squadrons. The remainder of this study will try to give you my findings in the excellent squadrons. Just what are they doing that makes them better? What are their priorities and how are they pulling it off?

I must say, the visits to the squadrons were fun. These guys helped me in more ways than I could ask. They were (understandably) happy to confirm that they were well thought of by the senior officers. But this was not the end. They were also eager to share with the VP world and me anything that they thought would be of use to us all. They all seemed very open and honest and were eager to express these feelings. There were also some complaints thrown in or suggestions on how to still better improve the situation. But, on the whole, it was a very positive response from all the personnel in the squadrons.

In the remainder of this study, I have tried to delineate those areas that the excellent squadrons seem to emphasize. After much deliberation and interpretation, I finally concluded that these attributes are as follows:

* The skipper's charting the course
* We push responsibilities down
* Continuous training
* Perpetual planning
* Visible pride

* Team from before tne start
* Fix it now (bias for action)
* We take care of our own.

In the chapters to follow, I will explain each of these areas. In addition, I will present their views of these areas from a cross-sectional representation of the members of the squadron.

To obtain a cross-sectional view of each excellent squadron, I visited each squadron from one to two days. During that period, I completed taped interview sessions of 45 minutes to one hour with each of the following:

* Commanding Officer
* Executive Officer

Then I completed the same with the following groups:

* 2-3 department heads (with ops and/or maintenance)
* 3-4 junior officers
* 3-4 chief petty officers
* 4-5 first and second class petty officers
* 4-5 third class petty officers and airmen

I promised total anonymity throughout these interviews to promote open and frank discussion. The tapes were strictly for my own use in reconstructing their thoughts and ideas on how the folks were achieving excellence. In these interviews, I merely explained my purpose as trying to find out first, did they feel that they were in an excellent squadron and

second, how were they achieving this state of excellence? The answer to the first was immediate and with no hesitations. These people did believe they were in an excellent squadron. All stated that they were still improving and maybe they weren't the best in the whole Navy, but they were definitely right up there or well on their way. The answers to the second question were a bit more involved and in the next few chapters I'll expound on their ideas.

VII. THE SKIPPER'S CHARTING THE COURSE

It was expressed in various ways, but it was clear that the commanding officer is a driving force. As I talked to the Cos of the different squadrons, they seemed to have different styles of management and leadership. Apparently, there is no one style of management that is required in order to achieve excellence. In the coming sections, I will try to give you a flavor of the styles of the different COs through quotes or ideas which I will use as representative.

Regardless of the style, these commanding officers chart the course. They decide what it is that the squadron should be doing and communicate this to every individual in the unit. From the CO topside, to the wrench turner on the hangar deck, there seems to be a clear understanding of where they are heading. The COs of the excellent squadrons provide the all-important objective or vision (as it is referred to by Peters and Waterman). This comes out differently in the squadrons, but it always centers around primary mission and being the best. One CO that was representative stated, "I preach war fighting capability!" He went on to say that the Soviets are scared to death of a P-3 and have designated them as a top target for their fighters. According to him, that means we are doing our job. Others speak of just being the

best damn anti-submarine warfare squadron at that base or on that coast or possibly even in the entire Navy. They are going for it! These commanding officers are aware of their responsibilities and they respond to them as a challenge. They do set the course for the squadron and they know where they are going!

A. CLEARLY DEFINED GOALS

Without exception, I received indications of clearly defined goals in each of the squadrons that I visited. After the CO has provided the objective, he sets out to gain agreement on clearly defined goals that everyone understands and can adopt as their own. This is where these excellent COs begin to really take advantage of the talent around them. They don't just say these are the goals and this is how we'll get to where I want to go. There is usually some form of discussion with the department heads as to what the goals should be. Two of the squadrons had held sessions or actual workshops where they decided on the goals of the squadron. Though the methods are different, the product is the same, clearly defined goals.

The next step is that they set out to disseminate these goals to the squadron personnel. Even these excellent squadrons are not totally successful at clearly communicating the goals. Often the perceptions of the goals differed somewhat from one level to another, but it generally came out

to being the best that they could be or doing the job the best that they knew how. This was usually not voiced as striving to get the Battle E or any particular award. It seemed that they just wanted to do their best and if they received a reward for that, then so be it! As one airman put it, "I've never seen a sheet in writing...but I know he wants the obvious things, to be the best we can be and keep those planes flying." This comment was somewhat typical of how the goals were perceived on the hangar deck.

In one case, the CO was seen by some on the hangar deck as going for the awards. However, this was not necessarily perceived as a negative approach. One third class petty officer told me that his skipper wanted the Isabelle Trophy, the tactics trophy, the Battle E, and all the awards. But he went on to explain that those trophies would benefit everyone in the squadron in the long run because it would help to make their squadron the best on that coast and possibly the best in the fleet. In this same squadron there was a junior officer, when asked if he knew the CO's goals, he stated, "Yup! Our skipper's an E skipper, but there's a difference--that's not a bad connotation. I have no repsect for a guy who wants to be mediocre. I want to play on a team that wants to win, not a team that wants to just be there. I think it's great." So even in those cases that personnel on the hanger did think that the CO was out for the awards, it was not considered a bad goal to strive for.

B. SETS PRIORITIES

These excellent squadrons have their priorities straight and everyone understands what they are. This again is because of the commanding officer. He establishes these priorities and communicates them to the entire squadron. They differ somewhat from squadron to squadron, but among the top ones are people and safety. These squadrons realize that they are in a peace time setting now and nothing that they do should jeopardize the lives of any of the squadron personnel. Everyone realizes that this one might change should war break out, but in the meantime nothing is tolerated that endangers life and limb. Beyond this, there is usually an emphasis on some area such as training in general, increasing their operational readiness or preparing for a major inspection that is coming up. But whatever the case may be, these squadrons set definite priorities and continuously communicte what the priorities are. These squadrons have their priorities straight.

C. DO IT RIGHT THE FIRST TIME

These COs emphasize that their direction for the squadron is set because it is what they should be doing. They are doing it right! All of the COs emphasized doing things right, not only for the squadron, but for the individual as well. This just seems to make everything easier because

everyone can understand the rules. This is the guidance used whenever questions arise. An exemplary statement was, "The CO's got to demonstrate integrity down. Then they (the command personnel) do the same." They are honest in their training, in their operations, and in the numbers they report because they do it right. By doing it right the first time, their tasks are completed quicker. As we all know, time is at a premium throughout VP. But, more importantly, doing it right the fisrt time provides the squadron a philosophy on the entire set of rules and how the game should be played.

D. HIGH STANDARDS

In all of the squadrons I visited, I found that they set very high standards and that these, as well, came from the top. One executive officer explained to me that by setting high standards and demanding quality work, he was able to keep the internal problems to a minimum. This allowed tne squadron to be better able to adapt to the external forces over which they have little or no control. According to him, the external forces, e.g., commitments, are constantly changing and the squadron must be able to constantly adapt. He went on to explain that this approach best allows the CO to be looking down the pike and try to best anticipate getting the squadron ready for whatever contingencies may arise. This continual demand for only the highest standards throughout the entire squadron seemed to be one of the keys

in acnieving and maintaining the squadron's position of excellence.

E. CONSISTENT LEADERSHIP STYLE

As I stated previously, it seemed that there was no one leadership style that was required to achieve excellence. However, of the COs that I talked to, the dominant styles seemed to be leadership by example and the team builder or coach style. As long as the CO's style was consistent, the squadron personnel knew what to expect. One department explained that his CO maintained a total involvement with the people and the squadron. It's not just being able to jump through the major hoops, but it's being able to do all those other things, the sports activities, the Combined Federal Campaign, and having the people want to do these things. All squadrons emphasize the NTPIs (Navy Technical Proficiency Inspection) and the MRCIs (Mining Readiness Certification Inspection), but these squadrons also do all those other little things in an outstanding manner! These skippers, through their consistent leadership style, are able to bring that squadron together as a unit to accomplish the heretofore believed impossible.

Of one CO who considered himself to be a coach type leader, one of his department heads stated, "Number one thing--we've got a skipper over here who's got this pride in being the best squadron. Everything he does, whether it be

sports, playing Trivial Pursuit, anything! He has driven that home several times and it becomes (a way of life). Everybody has gotten on the bandwagon." He felt that this was critical to the success of the squadron and had allowed them to continually strive for excellence.

Another CO stated his approach as, "The bottom line is leadership by example--just like the rest of them, I come to work on time, I put in a full day's work, I fly, preflight, 10 hour flights with my crew--I take them just like everybody else." This CO felt that he must provide the example for his subordinates to follow. He felt this to be the only way to truly drive home the point that he believed in what they were doing and was committed to its accomplishment. He was definitely showing the way!

Regardless of the leadership style, what came through in every case was a true concern for his people and active involvement in their welfare. This type of true concern seems best exemplified by an incident related to me during an interview with one executive officer. It seems that the base was cracking down on motorcycles and motorcycle safety because of the problems the Navy has in this area. A mandatory inspection and training course were implemented by the base. The program could have gone unnoticed by most anyone that didn't ride a motorcycle, but not this CO. He gathered bike riders from every section of the command; junior officers, senior enlisted, and junior enlisted.

During discussions, he was just trying to get a good feel for the groups reaction to the new procedures. His real concern was that they would perceive it as harassment. He then explained that it might be perceived as harassment, but that it was intended only for their safety. Since their safety was important to him, he asked them to support the program. According to the executive officer, it was a back and forth exchange and everyone walked away feeling better about it, "...but his concern was for the people." This seemed to be the type of true concern that the successful COs had regardless of their individual leadership style.

VIII. WE PUSH RESPONSIBILITIES DOWN

Over and over I heard that the best approach is one of macro-management. This means that they don't get into the nitty-gritty of how a job should be accomplished. These excellent squadrons seem to do that very well. Everyone is an important part of the team and all are expected to carry their weight. By this being the mode of operation, one CO explained that what you end up with is an E-3 on the hangar deck making the CO love his decisions! This way the decision and the effort are made at the lowest level possible, keeping the top of the organization relatively uncluttered so that the CO can see the direction the organization is taking. This CO spoke for the majority when he said, "I can just sit back and see which way we're drifting--and peak and tweak--from an overview aspect." This big picture approach seemed to work very well for these squadrons and they utilized it well. However, it seems that a certain environment has to be created in order for this approach to work.

B. THE ENVIRONMENT

Apparently, the command must go to great lengths to create an environment in which this type of approach will work. It doesn't just happen. According to the people I talked to in these excellent squadrons, you have to be able

to accept the fact that people make mistakes and you can't cut them off at the knees when they do. As a senior officer, you have to be willing to accept some errors and as a junior officer or enlisted, you need to know that you can make some errors and the command will still support you. This type of setting is crucial to their success.

This environment starts at the top with the CO giving the department heads full rein as to how to run their departments. Often the style or method used is not the one the CO would have chosen, but he does not interfere until he does not agree with the outcome. This allows the department head to push the responsibilities even lower into his chain and set up his department the way he sees fit. This allows for the development of junior officers, chiefs, and senior enlisted. This approach has the snow balling effect that gets the decision making to the lowest level. But it's the ever present support and backing from above that allows these subordinates to make the critical day-to-day decisions that are necessary without the fear of being hung out to dry.

A crew holding[1] junior officer tacco explained that this was the type of environment that was necessary for him to go out there on station and do a job. He felt that even if he made a bad call, based on the best information he had at the

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[1] Since there are only twelve crews, not all junior officers are able to head their own crew, i.e., crew holding.

time, the CO would support him to the hilt and if necessary go to the commodore and explain why the action was taken. These guys had the feeling that when they need it most, i.e., when they do screw up, that support will be there. They won't be hung from the cross. This type of perception was important throughout the command. When I asked one E-3 what happens if he screws up, he said, "They're really fair about that. I've encountered a couple of problems here lately, so I could have really got shot down. But they give you a few chances. It makes your morale a lot better. If they would have screwed me on my first shot or my second one even, I'd have said to hell with this place." But the airman hadn't said to hell with it and, according to his peers, was a very productive member of the command. When they need it most, in the excellent squadrons the support is there!

B. LEARN FROM MISTAKES

The flipside of the coin of the forgiving attitude was that everyone is expected to learn from his mistakes and, whenever possible, share the mistakes so that others could learn as well. This was explained as it's okay to make a mistake, but if you do the same thing again, i.e., you don't learn from your mistakes, then you're going to be held accountable in some form or fashion. An executive officer seemed to sum the attitudes of the excellent squadrons, "Everybody makes mistakes...but I've never worried about

mistakes. I make them and I try to use that as a learning tool for the next time. You're an idiot if you do it twice!" He explained that he tries to benefit from his mistakes so that he doesn't make the same error again and he tries to impart that to all his subordinates.

The second portion of this idea is to get the mistakes out in the open so that everyone can benefit from the error. The entire squadron seemed to understand and use this approach to learning from their mistakes. One of the junior officers told me that during their Friday morning AOMs (all officers meetings) they take some time for the crewmembers to explain how or why something went wrong on one of their flights in order that that entire wardroom may benefit and not have to make the same mistake. According to him, it's a purely voluntary thing, but everyone feels free to use it, again because of the environment established in these commands. They get it out in the open and talk about it in the excellent commands.

IX. CONTINUOUS TRAINING

Throughout my conversations with the personnel in the excellent commands, continuous training arose as one of the reasons that they felt they were doing a good job. Many felt that even though they did as much as they were doing, more training was needed in many areas. It was an approach that seemed to say if you weren't the student involved in learning something from an event, then you should be teaching what you know about the event to someone else. It was an idea that training had to be done constantly and correctly.

A. CONSTANT

In almost every instance, the people of these commands felt that because there was such a rapid turnover of personnel that the training must be a constant, ongoing effort. This was explained quite nicely by a first class petty officer. He said that one of his subordinates came to him and told him how he was better trained than the others and should be rated appropriately. The first class told him that he was in fact carrying a larger share of the load, but he was also being held responsible for passing on his wealth of knowledge to those below him. This was part of his job as well. This seemed to bring on the light for the subordinate, for he realized that otherwise, when he left, the knowledge

would leave with him. This is not allowed to happen in the excellent squadrons.

One chief petty officer seemed to summarize what was being said, "I feel that you need to stop a situation if you're the only one in the command that can do the job or that's perceived to be able to do the job, because you're not doing it right!" By this he means that you should be training someone else to take your place or at least be able to if need arises. The world of VP has a very rapid turnover rate and as soon as you learn something well, you are expected to begin teaching it to others. It's a way of life!

Another unique approach that these squadrons seem to have is that they hold the individual responsible for his own training. They don't track anyone around and push or shove for him to please get his training done. The individual is expected to actively pursue the training on his own. Everyone then sees that the guy who gets out there and gets his training done quickest is the guy who is given the responsibility and the position. The junior officer that hits the deck running, so to speak, and finishes his qualifications in fifteen to eighteen months instead of the allowed twenty-four, is the one that becomes a crew-holding patrol plane commander or mission commander as a junior officer. These guys have the idea and several of these

squadrons have people getting fully qualified within fifteen months.

This approach was working on the hangar deck, as well. A first class mecnanic told me that they don't baby-sit the guys on training anymore. It's no longer the supervisor that's held responsible for the training. He said, "It's you!" They emphasize that the individual is responsible for the completion of his training. This way, the individual is always trying to complete those tasks that he has not done, gain the experience he needs, and move up in the world. In these squadrons, training is a big item and it is done continuously.

B. CORRECT

It seems that it's also important to the personnel that the training be done the right way. I heard it many times, many ways, but it kept sounding like getting back to the basics and doing it by the book. The comments of a first class flight engineer seemed representative when he told me they were doing the training the way it was designed to be done, "We're finally getting around to doing it by the book." According to him, this was one of the main reasons for the squadron's success. The people are getting the training they need, jobs are getting done faster, and they are getting done safer. They are being held individually accountable for doing the job the correct way. As he put it, "Nobody's

crawling out on the wings to do a job when they know they can use a stand, because they're being held accountable individually for their actions."

This same idea of training correctly pervades the actions of the entire squadron. A department head told me that while they could have concentrated on training just six flight crews for the all important MRCI, they trained all twelve crews. They did this not to improve their score (in fact, it probably caused them to get a lower score), but they did it that way because the mining mission of the squadron is an important mission and if the need ever arises, the entire squadron needs to be able to perform the mission, not just six crews. That pretty well summarizes why these squadrons feel the way they do about their training programs. They do it right and look to the overall mission rather than the "wickets."

X. PERPETUAL PLANNING

In the majority of the interviews with the personnel of these squadrons, I kept hearing about all the planning they do. They have both long and short range plans, e.g., weekly, monthly, at-home and operational plans. Even though these plans are constantly changed, they try to plan everything as best they can. There are many and various approaches to this planning process. Some speak of project officers who plan for major evolutions. Others have planning committees that oversee particular events. But regardless of the evolution, these squadrons have a plan for its successful completion. They do their homework and are ready for most contingencies. They also try very hard not to reinvent the wheel. As one XO told me, they strive to research all the applicable instructions and gain information from otner squadrons so that they are able to plan properly and get it done right the first time.

A. WORK IN THE FUTURE

Many of the squadrons feel that due to the planning they force themselves to do, they are able to work in the future. This keeps them out of the crisis management and keeps them looking forward. One CO said that he and the XO closely monitor the daily excecution of the squadron by seeing how

many of the flight scheduled events are completed and what the maintenance status of the aircraft is. According to him, by doing this, they don't need a lot of feedback from the department heads on how things went. That way, the department heads can be working in the future to ensure that the next day's or next month's planned events come off as they are intended to. They feel that only by working to the future can they properly achieve all the necessary requirements to maintain and increase their position. Even in those rare instances when these guys miss an event such as a WST (weapons system trainer), through minor adjustments to the overall plan, they are able to compensate with little or no detriment to the squadron. It's all part of the plan!

This type of planning was the thing that allowed these squadrons to accomplish things over and above the norm. A junior officer I spoke to was directly involved in the weekly plan put out by the squadron. According to him there are constant and multiple changes to the plan, but the personnel of the squadron have come to rely on the plan. It allows them to be able to accomplish those myriad of tasks which are required continuously. As he explained, "Just this month, we had 24 on-top points[1] with half of the crews on leave."

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[1] An on-top point is awarded to the crew that successfully detects and localizes a submarine.

That's quite a feat and according to this junior officer, in-depth, future planning allows them to achieve this type of performance.

By using and updating their weekly, monthly, and long range plans, they are able to keep track of those little things that might otherwise fall through the crack. A chief told me that their squadron was going to be in the middle of work-ups when their dental examinations were due. But because they planned for these examinations, everytning went quite smoothly and they received, "...a lot of THANK YOUs from the medical department on being ready to go when it was our turn." This type of attention to detail through planning has helped them to gain the reputation which they now enjoy.

B. ADAPTABLE TO CHANGE

Right on the heels of any mention of a plan, there would come the notion that everyone has to be adaptable to changes. One CO stated it well for all, "The key to any plan is flexibility." They had planned their entire at-home cycle while they were still deployed. Even though they had only been home from deployment for a short time, many changes had already been made to the plan. According to him, the overall plan is still a good general guideline, but everyone has to be adaptable to changes in the plan. There are constant changes to be made and new items to be included. Anyone who expects the original plan to be written in granite with no

changes will become very frustrated. The world of VP is in an environment of constant change. These excellent squadrons are more than flexible, they are fluid. They change and adapt quickly and as necessary.

XI. VISIBLE PRIDE

Without exception, in the squadrons that I spoke with there was a great deal of pride in their unit. They had no reservations about being identified as a part of the unit and were openly proud of that affiliation. This pride seemed to show up in whatever they were doing and was evident at all levels. A flight engineer's comment concerning the cleanliness of the aircraft was representative. He said, "When we pick up people from other squadrons to haul somewhere, and they look at the airplane, it just makes you feel that much more proud to be in VP-AB. Because these other people say, 'Wow, are these new airplanes?' Because the palne is just so well kept inside--they're always clean." They work hard and continuously to maintain their aircraft in such a condition and they are deservedly proud! According to this flight engineer, it's just like your house, car or shop, the cleaner you keep it, the more pride you have in it and you're willing to work hard to keep it that way. Their efforts showed up throughout the squadron. They take care of their spaces, they're proud of them and it is immediately evident. I haven't seen so many squadron patches, plaques, and banners since I was in the Philippines.

A. EXPECTED TO DO BETTER

In most cases, these squadrons had enjoyed a good reputation for quite some time (this was the case in three out of the four squadrons). To these folks, it seemed that it was their duty to carry on the reputation. One junior officer seemed to sum it up, "It's like (joining) the Yankees or the Cowboys." Someone comes into the organization, they might not be a stellar performer, but they get caught up in what's going on and perform well above what they might otherwise have done. Interestingly enough, even in the squadron that had not enjoyed this long standing reputation, there was a feeling of being expected to do better. This was explained by one of the department heads, "Until recently, VP-AB had been in the pits around here. We've got a group of people together here that say, 'This is B.S.! We're going to be good and there's no reason why we can't!" We sort of came together as a team and made it happen--within the last year. A year ago, you would not be talking to us."

B. MIND SET TOWARD SUCCESS, WE CAN DO ANYTHING

Many of the individuals within these squadrons feel that a big reason for their success is just a matter of mind set. A department head seemed to wrap up what was being said. He stated that they are doing more and doing it better, but that was how it should be. These squadrons volunteer for the flights that nobody else wants. They'll take the flight even

though they won't be able to get the all important on-top point. They just feel that they'll be successful at whatever they attempt and it will all work out in the long run. They are quite willing to pull better than their share of the load. They feel it is expected of them. It's just a mind set and that's the way they are!

This attitude is not limited to within the wing. Even though they beam proudest when they are able to help a sister squadron, they really seem delighted to help others, as well. A mech shop chief gave one of the representative examples. He explained that a transiting plane had returned to their line shortly after takeoff with about five pounds of shavings in the gear box (that's a real clue that an engine change is needed). Within 18 hours, they completed an engine change with just the duty section and had the aircraft back out on a check flight! No one complained. No one griped. They just got it done in short order and they were proud to help.

XII. TEAM FROM BEFORE THE START

The idea of being a well-run team ran throughout these squadrons. It started very early so as to get the new guy on board as a vital team member as quickly as possible. In fact, these squadrons go to great lengths to get to the newly ordered in personnel in their very own special way. All squadrons have some sort of sponsor program and the standard welcome aboard packet. But these guys do it all. One of the chief's comments were representative as he explained that it begins as soon as the guy gets orders. They maintain a list of selectively screened sponsors that represent the cream of the crop. They drop the individual a personal note of welcome, he gets a letter of information about the squadron and what's going on from the commanding officer, and a very informative welcome aboard packet. On top of this, if they ever fly through his area, one of the crewmembers go over to say hello and that the squadron is anxiously awaiting his arrival. When they arrive in the area (initially assigned to the training squadron), they get someone over to greet him and invite him over to the squadron to show him around. When he gets to the squadron, he already feels like he's one of the team.

This attention to the individual is really paying off for these squadrons. The majority of the people I talked to really felt they were an integral member of the team early on. You don't have to pay any dues. This was stated quite well by a chief that stated, "When I first came in I didn't feel like I was the new person. I came in, went right to work and I felt comfortable." Sounds like a squadron you wouldn't mind checking into, doesn't it. By the time you check aboard, you're already a team member. These squadrons aren't really doing anything wildly new or innovative. They're just actively using those things that are available to all the squadrons.

A. SUPPORT FOR ALL

A common theme in my interviews with the top leaders from these squadrons was that they totally supported their people. In the final analysis, they put their trust in their personnel and that's what's doing it for them. This was stated quite eloquently by an executive officer that said, "I think that what we're doing that makes us good is that we take care of the people and the people take care of the squadron." They work hard at trying to ensure that there is job satisfaction at every level and that everyone is able to achieve it. They also work hard at seeing that they recognize outstanding performance because they realize that the people in the squadron are the key to its success.

This support from the top was quite noticeable and surfaced at all levels of the command. A junior officer's comments seemed representative. He said that his skipper naturally backs him all the way when he is right. But, more importantly, he will also back him if he thought he was doing the right thing, even if he screwed up. If he acted inappropriately, then he'll take a hard look at it from there. These junior officers feel that they can go out there and make the tough calls without being nailed. This feeling of support is necessary for these guys to go out and do the job!

One commanding officer actually revealed an incident in which this all-important support was necessary.

> We had one crew that had a tough (event) against a Soviet boat. They came back and it was very visible and we caught some flack and so forth. The potential was there to take away tacco papers and mission commander papers and all that other kind of stuff, but we didn't do any of that. That crew went into a very thorough debrief...and we just used it to learn from. So the next time that we went down there on the same scenario--we sent four different crews--they were pumped up and ready to go, but it was still white knuckle time. I'm sure that any tacco that told you that he was anxious for the guy to do his thing (go fully evasive) on his watch while he was out there, would be lying to you because it's a run for the roses. But they went out there and knocked the guy stiff! And in the meantime, the crew that had problems down there the first time, went (out on another operation) and got 100 OSE (on station effectiveness, a perfect score!) and just pounded another Soviet boat into submission. They have since become one of the strongest crews in the squadron--they may have been strong at that time--but they got sucked in by a very smart Soviet skipper--tnat guy right there (he pointed to a picture on the wall), as a matter

of fact. I keep that picture up there, one because it's a good picture, but it's also a good, humbling picture.

The support for the crew was there when they really needed it! That's the type of support that's found in the excellent squadrons.

B. UNDESIRABLES ARE GONE

There is a flip side to the coin of support. In these excellent squadrons, once you are given the chance (sometimes a few chances, depending on the circumstances), if you don't become a team player, you are gone! This is characterized by the flight engineer who told me that anyone who continues to screw up is out! As he put it, when you screw up bad enough to see the skipper, you're no longer whatever you were. Aircrewmen are taken off aircrew status, CDIs (Collateral Duty Inspectors) are stripped of their status, and people who were working on the aircraft find themselves working for the first lieutenant (mopping floors, cleaning heads, etc.). The other squadron personnel like this because they say it gives a clear signal to new people assigned to the first lieutenant for an interim period that if they stay clean and do their job, they can go and work in the shops and take the places of these guys who are now cleaning heads.

These squadrons were really death on drugs! Not in my Navy! Without exception, they all take a hardline stance on drugs so that there can be no doubt in anyone's mind as to

their position. One chief related how the squadron initially held an open mast at quarters when the first crackdown on drugs began. He said the skipper stood the drug offender out in front at quarters, and told him he was being thrown out of the Navy because he's a dirtball, a drug abuser, an alcohol abuser, and was selling narcotics. He was not fit to serve witn these good, dedicated men. Then they marched him off to a truck that was to take him to the brig. Right after that, he called up the awardees in full dress whites and presented awards and good conduct medals. According to the chief, "That really impressed the troops!"

In most cases, these squadrons try to do a little preventive demonstration for those who might be sitting on the fence. One of the most representative examples of this was related by a chief who told me, "Mast in this squadron is a spectator sport." Before they hold Mast, they go around to the shops and announce that Mast will be held at 1400 and it's open to everyone. One of their requirements is that everybody that has checked into tne squadron since the last Mast, must attend. They provide a bit of preventive maintenance to the guy that's shaky, the one that might want to go downtown and coke a little or the one that may be thinking about writing a hot check, hoping it won't get back before pay day, or even the one that wants to use the telephone and call home at government expense. They feel it changes their mind when, "They go in Mast and see this guy

just get his (a portion of his anatomy) knocked in the dirt. Keeps them on the straight line!" The chiefs feel that this method of letting everyone know what happens when you get out of line is quite effective. The message is strong, be good or be gone!

XIII. FIX IT NOW (BIAS FOR ACTION)

For many varied reasons, there is a definitie attitude throughout these squadrons to get it fixed now. This very closely resembles the cnaracteristic that Peters and Waterman call, "A Bias for Action." This refers to more than just the maintenance of aircraft, but it is definitely evident in aircraft status. There appears to be various reasons for this attitude, but one that is prominent is that this is the way to get some time off. During the "at-home" cycle, everyone wants to take advantage of this period as much as possible. One CO explained it rather well for these squadrons. He asked me what I thought would happen when you tell a guy that we need 9 airplanes working because we need so many PTFs (pilot training flights), CTFs (crew training flights), or whatever the training requirements. Then you let the guy know that he's also going to have to work Saturday, too! The way the CO put it, the guy sure isn't going to do much Friday afternoon because he has to come in Saturday anyway. But you let the guy know he has four and a half days to get his work done so that he can have a long weekend, he'll be done ahead of time. This is more the way these squadrons operate. They get it done now!

I heard this type of approach at various levels throughout the command. The leading petty officer of an avionics shop told me that he has an open window policy. Since this didn't ring any bells with me, I asked him what that meant. He said that since they are right next to maintenance control, his people can't leave the hangar without passing right in front of the maintenance chief (the pusher of the maintenance department). So, when his people finish their work, if they are caught up on their training, etc., he lets them leave through the open window. This approach seems to work well for his shop because I noticed that they keep a minimum number of gripes on their board.

The action now attitude was experienced in other areas, as I mentioned before. One junior officer's comments were representative of their communications up and down the chain of command. He said that they don't wait. When they want something done and someone in the chain of command is not there, they immediately just pass it to the next step, then simply inform the missing guy upon his return. This makes a lot of sense and it keeps the information and the work load flowing.

There were other reasons, as well. These people enjoy their work and take pride in its accomplishment. This approach works while deployed, as well as during the at-home cycle. A maintenance officer told about their attitude which typifies these squadrons. They have a saying down in

maintenance that they've got more airplanes than the ops boss has flight requirements. This attitude helps them to keep those aircraft up and flying and more often than not, the ops boss runs out of aircrews before maintenance runs out of airplanes. As he stated it, "We have people, who when one of our aircraft comes back for an engine change--people are streaming out of the barracks and out of the shops--wanting to change that engine." These shops definitely seem to have this attitude. When the flight crews return and report discrepancies to maintenance control, there are shop representatives in there waiting to find out if any of their gear needs attention. They want to fix it now!

XIV. WE TAKE CARE OF OUR OWN

Without exception, these squadrons realize that their most important asset is their people. Most feel that by some luck of the draw or by design that they have received the best people from the detailers or that they have actively recruited the best people. Regardless of the means, now that they have tne best, they are bound and determined to treat them right. An XO told me about their Command Services Department that is set up to focus on their people programs. They have actually restructured the organization to be more responsive to the particular needs of the individual. Everyone has ready access to aid and assistance through the help available in this department. It just seems that, as a command, they are really concerned about the individual and cater to him or her. They have a whole department aimed solely at taking care of their own!

Treating their people right means not only helping them through troubled times when they occur, but also giving them a challenge in their working environment and giving them a chance to grow and develop. This means keeping them informed in every aspect of the command as a vital team member and giving them a shot at a better job and greater

responsibilities. Finally it means rewarding them appropriately whenever the occasion arises.

A. GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT ARE CENTRAL

These squadrons feel that it is mandatory to challenge their people in their jobs. They try to give every opportunity for them to grow and expand their horizons, regardless of the level. Some comments by one of the COs seemed representative. He explained that he opened up the department head meeting to every second tour officer so that even those guys who don't have a department realize that they are an integral part of the command management team. This type of challenge is definitely not limited to the top. An operations officer explained the extent to which they utilize their junior officers and it seems typical of the attitudes in these squadrons. He assigns them as project officers for a particular event. When they go over to brief the commodore for one of the major exercises, that project officer does the briefing, not the ops boss. This type of exposure lets the junior officer know that he is being counted on and he better have it all together. These squadrons definitely provide growth potential!

There is a snowballing of this effect down into the ranks and shops, as well. A second class petty officer told me, "The biggest thing that I've noticed is that they allow you to advance, if you apply yourself." He went on to explain

that he really likes the increased responsibilities and tries to pass them along to those who work for him. He feels that, since he cannot award higher rank, by awarding increased responsibilities, his people take greater pride in themselves and their job. These squadrons use this approach very effectively and it's working.

B. CONTINUOUS COMMUNICATIONS

In these excellent squadrons, they continuously try to get the word out to the troops so that the guy on the hangar deck knows what's going on. To them, this is extremely important. Their communications take various forms, but the old standards are not only there, they are being actively used. A CO explained that they hold regular captain's calls. They divide up into E-4s and below, E-5s and E-6s, and E-7s and above. They sit down in a room together and the CO passes out any information he wants and tells them what is planned and what they can expect. Then he hears them out, comments, bitches, complaints, and suggestions for improvement. They discuss the ideas and he makes use of the good ones by putting them into effect. In otner areas that he may not be able to change, he at least explains why it is the way it is. These people appreciate it and they see that they are an integral team member. They keep them informed!

Most of these squadrons have some method avaialable for the personnel to get questions answered that they feel are

not being handled correctly by the chain of command. One of the COs explained that, in doing so, the people can see that they do have a recourse with a faulty chain of command. They are careful to shoot things back to the chain of command that should have been addressed that way to maintain the importance of using the chain. These squadrons all have some such form of hearing complaints and, more importantly, they listen and take action.

Depending on the style of the CO, quarters are used extensively to pass information to the troops and to let them know what is going on operationally, as well. Even though listed in the plan of the day or flight schedule, the major events are brought up at regular quarters. These squadrons make a special attempt to keep quarters short and informative. Special quarters are often scheduled to coincide with special events or holidays to get out particular messages, instruction, or to simply say, "Please drive carefully over the holidays. We want you back alive!"

C. PUTTING RIGHT PEOPLE IN RIGHT PLACES

For many of the people throughout the command, the key to success is matching the person and the job. One of the COs explained that he gives a guy a shot at something and if he excels, he is rewarded commensurate with his capabilities. If that means putting a mid-grade O-4 into operations, vice the senior O-4 that had his shot, then in he goes and you

find a pasture for the senior guy. This works for him because now he has a guy in operations who wants and deserves to be there. Then you just give him a philosophy for running the job and you have a dynamo in the job. As he put it, "You don't have a department head, you've got a leader of that whole department." By matching the people with the job, this frees the CO to devote his energies to other areas while the operations department is running in automatic. These squadrons are matching the job and the individual and the results are readily apparent.

D. AWARDS, REWARDS AND PRAISE

There just aren't enough awards for these squadrons to give out and they sure don't hold back on doing just that! An XO gave the representative approach. They give out a lot of letters of appreciation and letters of commendation. They use all of their allotted Navy Achievement Medals, usually well before the year is over, and then they ask for more. They award all the programs they are authorized, such as the command advancement program, and they try for more. Every time they have quarters, they always have a group standing up to receive designation letters, letters of appreciation or good conduct medals or whatever. These excellent squadrons just can't seem to find enough awards and letters to give to their people!

But there are more than just the standard, or formal forms of recognition in these squadrons. As one CO said, "We do a lot of one-minute praising around here." There are COs giving out "red rocket atta-boys" for a task well done and shop chiefs just letting their people know that they are appreciated for the day-to-day jobs they complete. One of the COs explained that they look to praise at all levels. When a junior officer, a chief or even a senior enlisted does something, they encourage their department heads to shoot in a FYI (for your informatino) memo to the CO/XO. That way, they can see exactly what Petty Officer Smith has done and they write a little 'Good Job, Petty Officer Smith' memo and send it to him. They instill this in department heads and it filters down. They take the time to reward their people!

Are these commanding officers aware of the outside or unit awards? You bet they are! However, they are not chasing them for the awards themselves, but for what it does for the unit. One CO summed it up quite well, "The unit awards are important and they haven't been used enough...(they) are worth their weight in gold." But he explained that's because it's something physical that the people can latch onto and take pride in. It's a tangible reward for all the hard work they've done. So, yes! The COs are definitely aware of those outside awards, but want to get them in order to reward their people for a job well done!

XV. CONCLUSIONS, COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Well, there you have it. I hope you enjoyed visiting with the leaders of our VP world and the four excellent squadrons as much as I did. But I guess the real question is what can be gained from this experience?

If this study consisted of only the first phase of talking to the leaders of VP, I feel it would totally justified. This gives us in VP a chance to see, in writing, some of the thoughts and ideas of the senior officers. Their insight and wisdom can provide guidance for many who would otherwise not be able to benefit from their years of experience. It should also dispel some of the myths concerning, "They only look at this," or, "They don't care about that." They have the "very big picture" perspective and while they are understandably interested in results, it is not the only indicator which they use to determine their best. Even though they place their bets on the squadrons that bring home the bacon, they also expect more than operational excellence. While their expectations are pretty much the same, their ideas on how to go about achieving that excellence vary somewhat. However, the main thrust is the same and repeated often. It is this general thrust that I

offer to the VP world in general as being of the greatest importance to all of us for guidance and direction.

However, there is another part of the story and that is the visits with the excellent squadrons. Hopefully, this will provide an across-the-board representation of what excellent squadrons look, act, and sound like. However, this study is not really meant for these squadrons. This study is meant for those who might feel they have to look up to see the bottom or those who are on their way up and just need some idea of how to excel. I heard quite a few versions of, "It's the luck of the draw," or "It's just the cyclical nature of the VP squadrons." But in the same breath, these people would go on to tell me all the things that they were doing right. One particularly encouraging note was the squadron that was mentioned as being "excellent" when only one year ago, they too, were in the pack or even pack-minus. So there has to be more to it than just dumb luck. That more may very well be putting emphasis in those areas that these successful squadrons consider important.

Again, I do not offer this as a definitive study of the one and only way to achieve excellence. This is merely presented as an idea as to what the successful squadrons are doing and what seems to be working for them. The attributes they emphasize are summarized as follows:

* The skipper's charting the course
* We push responsibilities down

* Continuous training
* Perpetual planning
* Visible pride
* Team from before the start
* Fix it now (Bias for action)
* We take care of our own

My findings are open to interpretation and will hopefully promote discussion in the areas of leadership and management in VP. I didn't find any new and startling discoveries of styles or methods in my study. In fact, it seems to emphasize the basics from the accepted books in print on leadership and management. Maslow's hierarchy of needs are tended to by these squadrons while McGregor's theory Y is the dominant operating form. They pay particular attention to mix of task completion with concern for the individual as proposed by Blake and Mouton and seem to be operating under the double loop learning exposed by Argyris. Several of the leaders had read and were well aware of In Search of Excellence. One even stated that he had made it required reading for his department heads when he was CO. I got the idea that, given the time, these leaders could write authoritative books on leadership and management. I would hope that this study of our world of VP will also provide a basis of comparison between this and other communities (as

recommended in an earlier thesis by Gullickson and Chenette, Excellence in the Surface Navy).

I have thoroughly enjoyed this study and hope that it will serve as an aid to those of us in the VP community. I offer it as my contribution toward the continuing study of leadership and management in our U.S. Navy.

APPENDIX A

THE VP COMMUNITY

The VP community is the organization designed for shore-based, fixed-wing, anti-submarine warfare in the U.S. Navy. Administratively, the east and west coast functional wings report respectively to Commander, Naval Air Atlantic (COMNAVAIRLANT) and Commander, Naval Air Pacific (COMNAVAIRPAC). These commands, headed by Commander, Patrol Wings Atlantic (COMPATWINGSLANT) and Commander, Patrol Wings Pacific (COMPATWINGSPAC), each have operational wings that report directly to them. These wings are located in Brunswick, Maine (Patrol Wing Five), Jacksonville, Florida (Patrol Wing Eleven), Moffett Field, California (Patrol Wing Ten), Barbers Pt., Hawaii (Patrol Wing Two), and Atsugi, Japan (Patrol Wing One).

A typical patrol wing consists of six or seven squadrons. Each squadron is comprised of approximately 320 personnel, of which about 60 are officers and the remainder are enlisted personnel. The typical squadron has nine P-3 aircraft operated by their twelve crews. These squadrons have the mission of long range antisubmarine reconnaissance and patrol using the Lockheed P-3 Orion. The aircraft is powered by four turboprop propeller engines, carries a crew of 12 on

missions that may last as long as twelve hours, and uses a variety of sensors to locate and track enemy submarines. The aircraft is readily identifiable by its tail-mounted "stinger," which is a magnetic anomaly detector (MAD) probe used in submarine detection.

These squadrons make deployments to advanced areas such as Keflavik, Iceland or Misawa, Japan for a six-month period. They then return to their home base for a nine-month to one year training cycle. During this period, the squadron must complete its necessary training requirements. To prove their expertise in different areas, the squadrons are required to satisfactorily complete certain major evolutions. These are often referred to in the VP world and are as follows:

* NTPI - Navy Technical Proficiency Inspection
* MRCI - Mining Readiness Certification Inspection
* NATOPS - Naval Air Training and Operating Procedures Standardization
* ORE - Operational Readiness Evaluation
* CI - Command Inspection

This type of inspection is regularly scheduled during the at-home cycle along with other inspections of the spaces, the aircraft (for corrosion), and the personnel. This overview will hopefully give you some insight into the world of VP as you go through the study.

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